



Use of Public Legal E-Services among Lawyers and Non-Lawyers: Knowledge Based Society Perspective

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Legal e-services are any kind of information society services, which are in any connection to legal information such as simple inquiry of legal information or more complex services, such as access to registers, records and databases, or comprehensive and integrated legal services that connect different information systems and enable the implementation of various legal or administrative services. Legal service providers can be from public sector (public institutions: i.e. parliament, government, courts, public agencies), or from private sector (providers of online legal services: unbundled legal services, virtual lawyering and document review, legal guidance or opinions etc.). In our paper we will focus only on public legal e-services. They are essential for legal profession to conduct legal services for their clients. On the other hand, non-lawyers or lay-people also use public legal e-services, in most cases access to legal information for resolving their own legal issues. Non-lawyers would like to be equal members of knowledge-based society considering use of ICT for gaining plain legal knowledge.

We researched different factors that influence the use of public legal e-services in Slovenia and researched its implications of use within the options of open access to legal information. Our research methodology was focused on the following research question: Do non-lawyers use public legal e-service to the same extent as lawyers to gain legal information? We tested two hypotheses using regression analysis:

- H1: Lawyers and non-lawyers use public legal e-service to a different extent.
- H2: Non-lawyers benefit more from using legal e-services than lawyers concerning access to legal information.

With the questionnaire we acquired responders' information about perceived use of legal e-services and their expectations about what acquired information means to them. We discovered a significant difference in use of public legal e-services between lawyers and non-lawyers. We found that some factors have different influence on the use of public legal e-services in populations of lawyers and non-lawyers. Mainly non-lawyers are less frequent but more optimistic users and they share an opinion that they can more easily solve their legal problems on-line in contrast to lawyers.

Regardless of the constitutional right to open and free access to public information, the access to legal information is worthless for non-lawyers if they do not understand the meaning of legal information or if information is hard to acquire. The sole access to legal information is not enough, because non-lawyers need simple instruction what to do in certain legal situation. Therefore, public providers of legal e-services should consider more non-lawyers oriented legal portals for lay people to help them solve their legal problems.

Keywords: legal e-services, legal information, information society, lawyers, non-lawyers